

THE SERVE AMERICA ACT (S. 277)

Expanding and Improving Domestic and International Service Opportunities for All Americans

The Serve America Act is a bipartisan measure to strengthen service and volunteer opportunities, after 16 years of inaction on this issue. It expands opportunities for individuals of all ages to serve, and its passage is especially important now, when so many communities are struggling to deal with pressing problems.

I. The Act Invites Many More Americans to Give a Year of Service to Solve Specific

Challenges: Building on the success of AmeriCorps, the legislation authorizes the creation of focused “Corps” to work on specific areas of national need such as Education, Healthy Futures, Clean Energy, Opportunity, and Veterans. The Act:

- Expands the number of national service participants to 250,000/year, as part of a new national commitment to addressing these challenges.
- Increases the Eli Segal Education Award from \$4,725 to \$5,350 to keep up with the rising cost of college, and link it to Pell Grants so it will continue to increase in the future. The Award can be used for pay for higher education, including student loans.

II. Support Increased Service Opportunities for Students. Service early in life will put more youth on a path to a lifetime of service. The Act strengthens the current Learn and Serve program and authorizes a Summer of Service program for middle and high school students.

III. Support Increased Service Opportunities for Retirees. Many retiring citizens are ready, willing, and able to be involved in service and have skills needed by our communities. The Act:

- Strengthens and expands the current Senior Corps programs – RSVP, Senior Companions, and Foster Grandparents.
- Enhances incentives for retirees to give a year of service through the new Corps, by enabling them to transfer their educational award to a child or grandchild.
- Creates “Encore Fellowships” to help retirees participate in longer-term public service.

IV. Support Increase of Opportunities for Volunteering by Persons All Ages. Many Americans who are not able to make a significant time commitment to service can volunteer in other ways. The legislation expands the volunteer pool by establishing a “Volunteer Generation Fund” to assist nonprofit organizations in recruiting and managing additional volunteers.

V. Support Innovation in the Nonprofit Sector: Social entrepreneurs who have launched innovative organizations such as Teach for America and Citizen Schools are experimenting with new solutions to pressing problems. The Act recognizes and supports the effective role of social entrepreneurs in meeting community and national challenges by establishing a “Social Innovation Fund” to serve as venture capital to help the nonprofit sector recruit talent.

VI. Support International Service Opportunities: The Act strengthens the current “Volunteers for Prosperity” program, which coordinates and supports short-term international service opportunities for skilled professionals in developing nations.